

Appendix: On the Editing of Heidegger's Nietzsche Lectures

Following are translations of passages from Heidegger's lecture course "Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art," which was published as volume 43 of the *Gesamtausgabe* under the title *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*. These passages are of interest because they were excised from the version of the lectures that Heidegger had published in 1961 and because they have an unmistakable political content. The original lecture course was held in 1936–37. This appendix cannot provide a comprehensive comparison between the original Nietzsche lectures as published in the *Gesamtausgabe* and the 1961 Nietzsche volumes.¹ But these selections from just the first volume of the Nietzsche lectures as published in the *Gesamtausgabe* should serve as sufficient preliminary evidence that Heidegger deliberately sought to eliminate those passages in the lectures which might not reflect well on his political stance. I am grateful to Otto Pöggeler for the suggestion to examine these texts for such discrepancies.

Example 1. A paragraph in volume 43 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, pages 30–31, ends, "A very profound knowing and an even more profound seriousness are needed for us to grasp what Nietzsche means by nihilism. For Nietzsche, Christianity is just as nihilistic as Bolshevism, and consequently just as nihilistic as mere socialism."

Heidegger leaves out the second sentence in 1961 (*NI*, 36).² After the war, this sentence must have struck Heidegger as too closely linked with the specific political situation of the 1930s. The reference to "mere socialism" (*der bloße Sozialis-*

mus)—such as practiced in the Soviet Union, presumably—suggests that perhaps a properly instituted *national* socialism would be acceptable.

Example 2. In the 1961 edition (*NI*, 183), Heidegger has eliminated the following lengthy passage from the original lecture (*GA* 43, 190–93):

a) NIETZSCHE'S WORD ON THE DEATH OF GOD

One of the essential formulations characterizing the event of nihilism is that “God is dead.” [The remainder of the passage was omitted from *NI*, 183, including the following parenthetical citation from Nietzsche:] (Cf. 13.75: “The *refutation* of God: really only the moral God is refuted.”)

Wherever it is cited, this saying of Nietzsche's is almost always very crudely misunderstood. Widespread stupidity and ignorance are mostly responsible for this, but frequently a naked will to provocation and calumny is also at fault and, often enough, even anxiety in the face of a meditation that hides nothing more from itself.

The customary interpretation of the saying “God is dead” goes as follows: Nietzsche is stating here, completely unambiguously, that the only possible remaining standpoint today is atheism. But exactly the opposite, and something more, is Nietzsche's true meaning. In his fundamental outlook toward beings, Nietzsche took as his starting point the knowledge that historical *Dasein* is not possible without God and without the gods. But God is God only if he comes [*kommt*], and indeed, if he must come; and his coming is possible only if the creative preparedness and the daring wager based on the ultimate limits are held up to him. But this is no received or yet again traditional God, one to whom we are not driven and by whom we are not compelled. The phrase “God is dead” is not a denial, but rather the innermost Yes to the one who is coming [*zum Kommenden*]. In this knowing and questioning, Nietzsche ripped open his *Dasein*. Meanwhile, during the founding years,³ people pestered the good Lord for all manner of things whenever they merrily hoisted their beer steins in the name of “God, Freedom, and Fatherland!” But this emptiness and mendacity first attained full expression when, between the years 1914 and 1918, the “Christian” West, friend and foe alike, claimed the same good Lord for its causes. Let it be understood: at issue in the contemplation of this event is always its totality. At issue is not the activity of individuals, which may still be possible and genuine in its own way, but rather whether this God still is and can be a principle who gives shape to the world and to Being. Nietzsche was frank enough to call himself a nihilist. This does not mean someone who says only “no” and wants to deliver everything over into nothingness, but rather someone who stands in the event of the dying God and hides nothing from himself, who above all says “no” to the universal mendacity, who says “no” because he has already said “yes” earlier and more vigorously and more seriously than his “Christian” contemporaries, who, with a

tremor in their voices, appealed to the true, the good, and the beautiful in their holiday speeches.

In this creeping mendacity that always says yes and no at the same time, Nietzsche saw the most dangerous form of nihilism: the form that even managed to come out *against* nihilism and, in the name of Christianity, do battle with the vulgarity of the so-called freethinkers. At one point, Nietzsche writes (12.416): “*The greatest event*: God is dead. Only mankind as yet does not notice that it simply lives off inherited values. Universal squandering and neglect.” This mere “living off” instead of building and grounding, this neglect instead of a breaking out onto the path to God, this was just what drove Nietzsche into his complete solitude. And this is “atheism”?! With the exception of Hölderlin, Nietzsche was the only believing man who lived in the nineteenth century. And Stefan George, who had none other than Nietzsche to thank for the metaphysical foundation of his entire poetic existence, thinks and speaks too quickly, and does not see the metaphysical need, when he says, in “Seventh Ring,” his poem on Nietzsche:

he came too late who said to you imploring:
yonder there is no further path over icy cliffs
and the nests of awful birds—the need is now
to banish oneself into the circle that love seals . . .

No, this challenge is not yet valid for the thinker, for the utmost need has not yet been experienced, the need of Being as a whole, out of which the cry to God will become a creative call to the Earth. What is greatest is done only by him who cannot do otherwise.

b) NIHILISM AND GREAT POLITICS

Europe still wants to cling to “democracy” and does not want to learn to see that this would be its historical death. For as Nietzsche saw clearly, democracy is just a derivative of nihilism, that is, the devaluation of the highest values in such a way that they are henceforward just that and only that—“values”—and no longer form-giving powers. “The ascendancy of the rabble,” “*the social mish-mash*,” “equal men,” “means once again the ascendancy of the *old values*” (WzM n. 864; 16.262/3). Therefore “God is dead” is not an atheistic dogma, but rather the formulation for the grounding experience of an event of Western history. I took up this phrase in full awareness in my 1933 rectoral address.⁴ [At this point, the 1961 text resumes.]

In 1961, Heidegger eliminated this passage with its vituperative tone and the harsh attack on democracy as an aspect of nihilism and the death of God. Furthermore, he connects this attack here with the rectoral address, a document he also sought to depoliticize as much as possible after the war. But in this lecture course delivered more than three years after the 1933 rectoral address, Heidegger explicitly connects an attack on democracy with the political significance of that address. It seems hard to avoid the conclusion that Heidegger decided to

eliminate the passage in the 1961 publication of his Nietzsche lectures as part of a deliberate strategy to cover up the extent of his commitment to the regime of 1933.

Why Heidegger chose to excise his reflections on the death of the moral God and his discussion of German and European nationalism up through the First World War is less clear. In this passage, we see that for Heidegger's Nietzsche, there is only the *pietà* and no resurrection. God dies on the cross, and the world of love, unity, selfless compassion, and justice—the *moral* world, to put it bluntly—dies with him, and dies with finality. Heidegger seems never to have set aside this particular teaching of Nietzsche's. Heidegger cites a saying from Nietzsche's *Antichrist* as the epigraph for this lecture course (*GA* 43, 1): "Nearly two thousand years and not a single new god!" This new god, a god-to-come, cannot simply be a repeated, resurrected, Christian God. In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger understands the present task of thinking to be a preparation for the approach of this "last God" who is "passing by" (*die Vorbeigang des letzten Gottes*). If one asked, "Did God *just* die on the cross and that's the end of it? Is God dead?" a thoroughgoing atheist might well answer, "There was never a *god* on the cross in the first place." But for Heidegger's Nietzsche, God is still *geschichtlich* because his death *is* still *present*, still a matter of *polemos* and *Auseinandersetzung* for the sake of a god or God *to come* (*der Kommende*). Thus Heidegger calls Nietzsche one of the *two* believing men of the nineteenth century (the other being Hölderlin). To Nietzsche and Hölderlin's Isaiah, Heidegger plays John the Baptist. But the coming God, whether resurrected or astoundingly new, is not one whose face any of them claims to have seen. Nor is it a God to save us from tragedy, even from catastrophe, for perhaps only apocalypse can ground *Dasein* anew. After all, Nietzsche championed a rebirth of tragedy, a rebirth of Dionysus—and the flayed Dionysus as a mirror and alternative to the crucified Jesus (*The Will to Power*, §1052). Perhaps Heidegger thought that it would be imprudent to publish this condemnation of conventional religiosity, bourgeois nationalism, and democracy in 1961, in a West Germany ruled by Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democratic Union. But his editing for the sake of prudence hardly instills confidence in his texts or in his motives for reworking them.

Example 3. The following passage closes the entire lecture course of the winter semester of 1936–37 (*GA* 43, 273–74). The 1961 edition has been significantly rewritten and edited (*NI*, 254), and indeed the entire part after the sentence "The 'Overman' is nothing for sentimental dreamers" does not appear at all. The passage concludes Heidegger's analysis of one of Nietzsche's sayings, "To see science from the perspective of the artist—but art from the perspective of life":

Taken at an even deeper level, this saying demands the knowing of the event of nihilism, and for Nietzsche, knowing means at the same time the will to overcome this event, and this from originary grounds and questions. To evaluate science according to its creative strength, and neither according to an immediate usefulness nor according to an empty eternal meaning; to evaluate this very creativity according to the originality with which it reaches down into Being itself, neither as the mere accomplishment of the individual nor as diversion for the many. To be able to value—and this means being able to act according to the essence of Being—is itself the highest creating, for it is the preparing of the preparedness for the gods, the Yes to Being.

“The Overman” is the human being who grounds Being anew in the severity of knowing and in the harshness of creating. The “Overman” is not for sentimental dreamers who fancy themselves significant but who in fact can be understood only through a knowledge of the “last man.”

Only a knowing that comes from originary grounds and questions grants a firm vision and decisiveness against the most dangerous nihilistic powers—those, that is, which hide themselves behind bourgeois cultural “activity” and artistic and religious reform movements. Those who appeal to what has been great up to now can do nothing for this greatness because they deny its innermost ground: the necessity of creating. For they cannot bear what is essential to creating: the necessity of destruction [*Zerstören-Müssen*]. And the greatest destruction lays hold of the creator himself. He must first cease to be his own contemporary, because he belongs least of all to himself, but rather to the becoming of Being. It was the knowledge of the fate of creators, in union with the knowledge of the death of God, that granted to Nietzsche, to the Dasein of the thinker, his great assurance in the midst of every upheaval and collapse.

The saying that Nietzsche wrote at the time of the publication of his first work in his own copy of the book applies also to his struggle with his last, *The Will to Power*:

Basel, New Year’s Day, 1872

Create—the daily work of my hands,
Great spirit, that I may finish it!

Heidegger was not prepared in 1961 to publish the original version of his 1936–37 lecture course that ends with such a paean to heroic nihilism. In the Germany of 1961, Heidegger’s withering scorn for the “bourgeois” and his embrace of the “necessity of destruction” might well have appeared embarrassingly reckless, especially given that virtually every German family, and every German city and town (not to mention non-German families and cities!) had felt the material reality of the utter catastrophe that Heidegger welcomes here. Thus Heidegger found a way to take the edge off his lectures, to make them seem more abstract and distant from the details of the political world of the time they were delivered: he excised the offending passages.